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OUR POSTAL SYSTEM.

By FRANCIS C. HUEBNER.

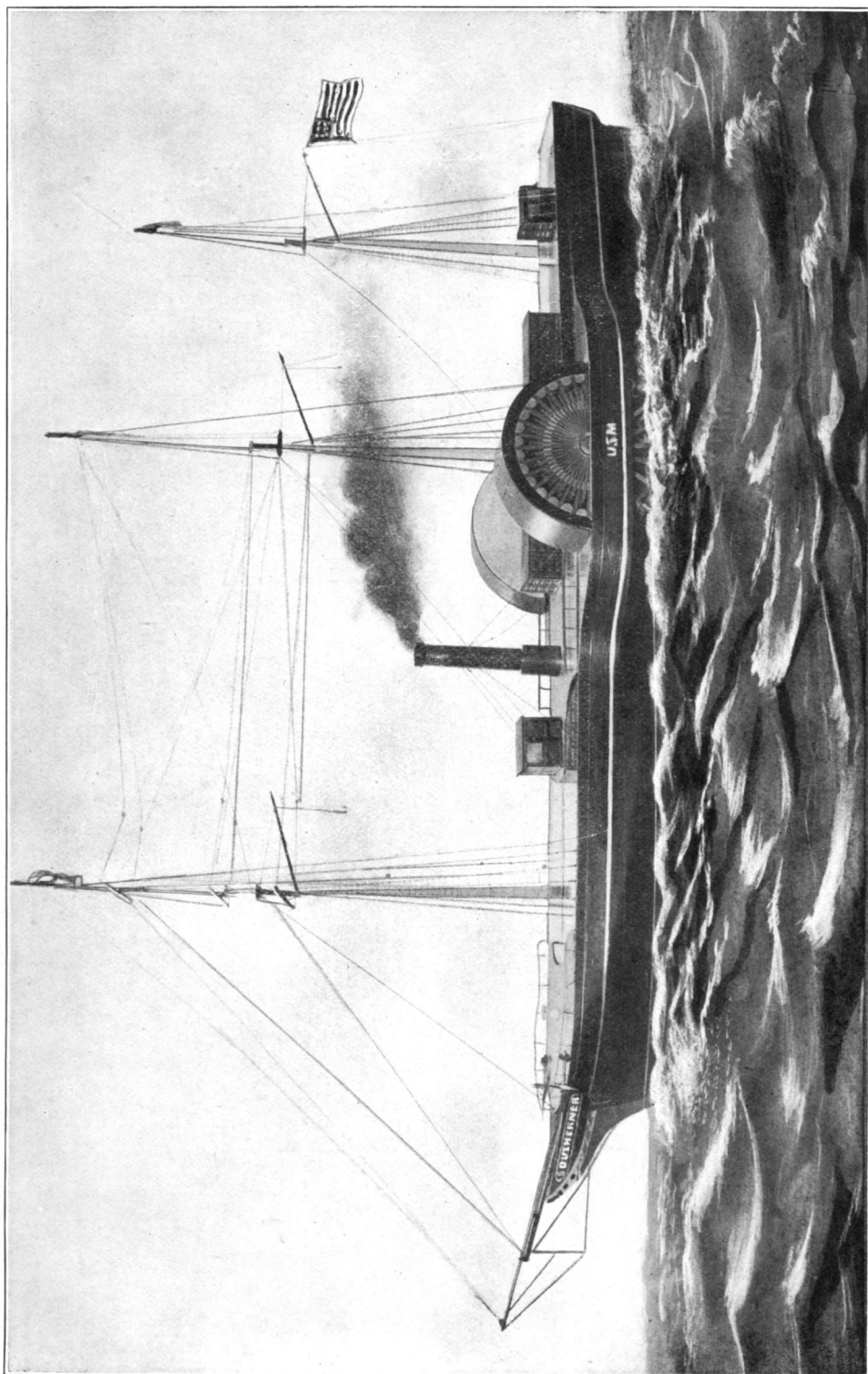
(Read before the Society, May 8, 1905.)

The first law directly affecting the American postal service was the English postal act of 1660, which was, in fact, the reënactment of an ordinance signed by Cromwell about 1656 or 1657. By this act the King was given authority to appoint one master of a "general letter office" to be established at London "by the name and style of His Majesty's Postmaster-General." The title "postmaster-general" was appropriate because that officer was the postmaster of the general post office of the English system.

At that period privileges and sometimes an entire monopoly were "farmed" out for a consideration by the King. In keeping with this custom section XVI. of the postal act of 1660 provided that:

"the King may grant by letters patent the office of Postmaster-General, its profits, privileges, fees, perquisites and emoluments thereunto belonging and the several rates of postage for life or a term of years not exceeding twenty-one years to such person or persons and under such covenants, conditions and yearly rents to his said majesty . . . as he shall think for the best advantage and benefit to the kingdom."

This postal system was intended for England, Scotland, Ireland and "other of his majesty's dominions," and "to and from all and every the kingdoms and countries beyond the seas where he shall settle or cause to be settled posts or running messengers for that purpose." While this law was applicable to America, no



THE SOUTHERNER, BUILT 1845-6. THE FIRST STEAMBOAT TO CARRY U. S. MAIL ACROSS THE ATLANTIC OCEAN.
(Photograph of model in possession of U. S. P. O. Dept.)

attempt was made to inaugurate a postal system therein for twelve years after its passage. In 1672, however, King George I. authorized Governor Francis Lovelace of New York to establish a post route between New York and Boston, and that same year the original post route of America was established "to goe monthly between New York and Boston." In a letter written by Governor Lovelace to Governor John Winthrop of Connecticut, dated December 27, 1672, among other matters he describes this new adventure as follows:

"The mail has divers baggs, according to the towns the letters are designed to, which are all sealed up till their arrivement, with the seal of the Secretarie's office whose care it is on Saturday night to seale them up. Only by letters are in an open bag to dispense by the wayes."

This service did not long continue. The lack of business enterprises which necessitated correspondence, the scattered population, the undeveloped condition of the country, and the troublesome war-like times were all against its success. Like the growth of all great enterprises, however, this failure was followed by a still greater project. In 1684 Governor Dongan of New York sought and obtained authority from the King of England to set up and maintain "post houses" along the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to Carolina, for which privilege he agreed to pay ten per centum of the profits to the British Government. This extensive route was not established at this time, however.

While these efforts were being made in New York and New England, William Penn was privately providing a postal system for his colony, and within ten years after the founding of Philadelphia, post routes from that city were in operation in every direction in which there were civilized communities.

THE NEALE PATENT.

A national postal system for America was not suggested until 1691 when William and Mary granted letters patent as prescribed by the act of 1660 referred to, to

“Thomas Neale, his executors, administrators and assigns, giving full power and authority to erect, settle and establish, within the chief parts of their majestie’s colonies and plantations in America, an office or offices for the receiving and dispatching letters and pacquets and to receive, send and deliver the same under such rates and sums of money as the planters shall agree to give, and to hold and enjoy the same for a term of twenty-one years.”

Neale made use of this authority by appointing Andrew Hamilton the first Deputy Postmaster-General of America, April 4, 1692. This appointment met with the approval of the Postmaster-General of England. Hamilton was a business man of large philanthropic tendencies. He had been in the mercantile business in Edinburgh but had emigrated to America about 1685 as the special agent of the proprietors of the New Jersey colony. He was interested in postal matters, and had theories concerning a postal system far in advance of his time and opportunity.

As New York had shown its interest in establishing long distance postal routes probably more than any other colony, Hamilton consulted the governor and legislature of that colony first and presented to them a model postal bill which he requested be enacted into law. The object of this bill, which was subsequently submitted to all the colonial legislatures, was to establish uniform rates of postage for like distances in all the colonies, to recognize the right of his principal, Neale, to a monopoly of the postal business, and to ap-

appropriate a proportionate part of the salary of the Deputy Postmaster-General of America.

All the colonial legislatures except Virginia passed the model postal bill with but a few modifications—Virginia did not desire to dispose of her postal monopoly in that manner—but, notwithstanding Virginia's action, that colony was included in Hamilton's inter-colonial Postal Union which began operations May 1, 1693. Weekly posts were established from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to Virginia, although roads were unknown and mail carriers usually required guides. House delivery of mail matter was established for all letters not called for at the post office within forty-eight hours after arrival, and arrangements were made for the transmission of letters to all parts of the civilized world. Hamilton paid his postal employees well. Deputy postmasters received £20 per year and mail carriers as much as £110 per year. The receipts for the New York post office for the year 1693 was but £61. This postal system being so thorough in detail, and postal business comparatively so small, resulted in a deficit the first year of the experiment of £2,360. Neale, expecting pecuniary returns from his patent, cared little for Hamilton's theoretical system, and at the end of the third year he assigned his patent to the enthusiastic Hamilton who continued until his death, April 20, 1703, to render the excellent character of service he had introduced. His death was generally mourned throughout the colonies as that of a public benefactor. Charles Read of Philadelphia, writing to Jonathan Dickinson at Jamaica, New York, August 17, 1703, expressed this sentiment thus:

“The death of our Governor Hamilton has broken all our measures. I doubt if we shall not be so happy in another,

he being an affiable, moderate man, and, as far as I could observe, free from that avaricious humor too predominant amongst us."

John Hamilton, son of the first Deputy Postmaster-General of America, succeeded to his father's rights under the Neale patent and continued the system his father had begun.

In 1707 the British government, desiring to have immediate control of the American postal system, paid John Hamilton £1,664 for his rights under the patent and appointed him Deputy Postmaster-General for America at an annual salary of £200—that salary being the same his father received from the colonies before the patent was transferred to him. The object of the British government was to make the American postal system a source of revenue, and after three years more of Hamilton's plan, with its accompanying deficits, the law usually regarded as the origin of the American postal system was passed, viz.: 9th Anne, 1710. The preamble of this act indicated that it was a war measure and intended for raising revenue, and is as follows:

"And whereas the several rates of postage may in many parts, with little burden to the subject be increased and other new rates granted, which additional and new rates may in some measure enable your Majesty to carry on and finish the present war." . . .

This act went into effect June 1, 1711. It provided that from and after the first day of June, 1711, there be from thenceforth one general letter office and post office to be erected and established in London, and that one master of the said general letter office and post office shall be from time to time appointed by the Queen's Majesty by the name and style of her Majesty's Postmaster-General. This act further pro-

posed one main post office for each American colony, and established uniform postage rates for like distances.

Immediately after this act went into effect posts were established weekly between New York and the capital of Virginia (Williamsburg) and bi-weekly between New York and Boston and Philadelphia and Annapolis. John Hamilton was continued in the office of Deputy Postmaster-General until 1730, during which time his constant aim was to improve the service. Some of his routes paid a profit, and this he immediately expended in the improvement of the service where the routes did not pay. The few routes along the coast started by his father were increased and new ones extended into the interior. The British government was not satisfied, however. The object of the act of 9th Anne to raise revenue was thus defeated, the sequel being the retirement of John Hamilton. In 1730 Hamilton was succeeded by Governor Spotswood of Virginia.

It was early in the inauguration of this system that Benjamin Franklin began his postal career. He was appointed deputy postmaster (which corresponds with the office of postmaster of to-day) at Philadelphia by Deputy Postmaster-General Spotswood in 1737, and sixteen years later was promoted to the office of Deputy Postmaster-General for America. In his autobiography he speaks of his appointment thus:

“Having been for some time employed by the Postmaster General of America as his comptroller in regulating several offices and bringing officers to account, I was, upon his death in 1753 appointed jointly with Mr. William Hunter to succeed him by a commission from the Postmaster-General in England. The American office had never hitherto paid anything to that of Britain. We were to have 600 pounds a year between us if we could make that sum out of the profits of the office.”

He then proceeds to tell of the improvements installed which in four years brought him and his co-deputy £900 in debt but that thereafter it repaid them. During Franklin's administration the postal receipts of America increased to three times those of Ireland. Franklin also intimates in his autobiography that none of his successors under the British crown made the American postal system pay a profit. While much credit is due to Benjamin Franklin for the improvements in the postal system during his administration, equal credit should be given William Hunter. While Franklin came to the office after serving in the position of deputy postmaster at Philadelphia, Hunter brought with him the experience of a deputy postmaster of Virginia's capital, Williamsburg, and the latter probably performed more of the actual work as Deputy Postmaster-General for the reason that during a greater part of the time while Franklin occupied the position he was traveling in England.

Just before the Revolutionary War, Franklin was dismissed from the American postal service by the King—this in 1774. Some authorities give as the reason that he was absent from America too much to give proper attention to his duties, while others state that he displeased the King by testifying against one of the King's representatives in America. After Franklin's separation from the British-American postal service the British interests until the close of the Revolutionary War were in the hands of John Foxcroft as Deputy Postmaster-General, who was assisted by Hugh Finlay, "Surveyor of Posts."

Before passing to the next period of our postal history it may be interesting to know the names of the men who served the colonies as Deputy Postmaster-General for America under the British government. They are as follows:

Debit Post Office at Bladensburg		Contra Credit	
1776	May 5. To Balance as first mentioned ending this day	1776	May 5. By Cash paid from office. New note of 100 ^{rs}
1776	April 25. To Office exp ^d 20 ^{rs}	1776	May 19. By Office exp ^d this day
1776	May 18. To Office exp ^d 10 ^{rs}	1776	May 29. By Office exp ^d this day
1776	May 24. To Balance of Lottery drawn and ending 24 th inst	1776	May 31. By Cash on this day
1776	June 18 th To Balance of ditto ending this Day	1776	June 4. By Office
1776	Aug 23. To Balance of ditto ending 23 rd inst	1776	June 17. By Cash paid this Day
1776	July 28 th To ditto of ditto ending 28 th inst	1776	Aug 23. By ditto from Elizabeth's Chamber
1776	Oct 14 th To ditto of ditto ending 14 th inst	1776	Feb 28 th By ditto from office
1776	Nov 14 th To ditto of ditto ending 14 th inst	1776	Feb 28 th By Cash on this day
1776	Dec 23 rd To ditto of ditto ending 23 rd inst	1776	Feb 28 th By ditto from office
1776	July 29 th To ditto of ditto ending 29 th inst	1776	June 23. By Cash on this day
1776	Balance due C ^o to Lawrence	1776	July 29 th By Cash on this day
1776	23. 1. 3	1776	23. 1. 4
Debit Post Office at Georgetown		Balance Contra	
1776	May 5. To Balance as first mentioned ending this day	1776	May 5. By Cash on this day
1776	April 25. To Office exp ^d 20 ^{rs}	1776	May 19. By Office exp ^d this day
1776	May 18. To Office exp ^d 10 ^{rs}	1776	May 29. By Office exp ^d this day
1776	May 24. To Balance of Lottery drawn and ending 24 th inst	1776	May 31. By Cash on this day
1776	June 18 th To Balance of ditto ending this Day	1776	June 4. By Office
1776	Aug 23. To Balance of ditto ending 23 rd inst	1776	June 17. By Cash paid this Day
1776	July 28 th To ditto of ditto ending 28 th inst	1776	Aug 23. By ditto from Elizabeth's Chamber
1776	Oct 14 th To ditto of ditto ending 14 th inst	1776	Feb 28 th By ditto from office
1776	Nov 14 th To ditto of ditto ending 14 th inst	1776	Feb 28 th By Cash on this day
1776	Dec 23 rd To ditto of ditto ending 23 rd inst	1776	Feb 28 th By ditto from office
1776	July 29 th To ditto of ditto ending 29 th inst	1776	June 23. By Cash on this day
1776	Balance due C ^o to Lawrence	1776	July 29 th By Cash on this day
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1776	May 18. To Office exp ^d 10 ^{rs}	1776	May 29. By Office exp ^d this day
1776	May 24. To Balance of Lottery drawn and ending 24 th inst	1776	May 31. By Cash on this day
1776	June 18 th To Balance of ditto ending this Day	1776	June 4. By Office
1776	Aug 23. To Balance of ditto ending 23 rd inst	1776	June 17. By Cash paid this Day
1776	July 28 th To ditto of ditto ending 28 th inst	1776	Aug 23. By ditto from Elizabeth's Chamber
1776	Oct 14 th To ditto of ditto ending 14 th inst	1776	Feb 28 th By ditto from office
1776	Nov 14 th To ditto of ditto ending 14 th inst	1776	Feb 28 th By Cash on this day
1776	Dec 23 rd To ditto of ditto ending 23 rd inst	1776	Feb 28 th By ditto from office
1776	July 29 th To ditto of ditto ending 29 th inst	1776	June 23. By Cash on this day
1776	Balance due C ^o to Lawrence	1776	July 29 th By Cash on this day
1776	23. 1. 3	1776	23. 1. 4

PAGE FROM FRANKLIN'S LEDGER OF POSTAL ACCOUNTS, SHOWING THE ACCOUNTS OF THE GEORGETOWN AND
BLADENSBURG POST-OFFICES.
(Photograph from original in possession of U. S. P. O. Dept.)

Under the Neale Patent:

Andrew Hamilton, 1692 to 1703.

John Hamilton, 1703 to 1707.

Under the British Government:

John Hamilton, 1707 to 1730.

Alexander Spotswood, 1730 to 1739.

Head Lynch, 1739 to 1743.

Elliot Bengier, 1743 to 1753.

William Hunter, 1753 to 1761.

Benjamin Franklin, 1753 to —.

John Foxcroft, 1761 to —.

In 1765 the postal territory of America was deemed too large and a division was made, the "northern" comprising the country from Quebec to Virginia, and the "southern" from Virginia to the southern limit of the British domain. The northern division was managed as the entire territory had been heretofore, by the two Deputy Postmaster-Generals, or by one and the Surveyor of Posts, with headquarters at New York and Philadelphia. They were:

Benjamin Franklin, — to 1774.

John Foxcroft, — to 1781.

Hugh Finlay (Surveyor of Posts) 1774 to 1781.

The southern division had its general post office at Charleston, S. C., and was presided over by

Benjamin Barrow, 1765 to 1766.

Peter De Lancey, 1766 to 1771.

George Roupell, 1771 to 1782.

THE "CONSTITUTIONAL" POST OFFICE.

Franklin's dismissal from the postal service brought forth a storm of protests from the Americans. Among the most outspoken was William Goddard, printer of the *Maryland Journal* of Baltimore, an ex-postmaster

and the son of a postmaster. He had theretofore through his paper, proposed an independent postal system for the colonies, and in direct violation of a section of 9th Anne which prohibited the operation of private expresses for the carriage of letters for hire, he induced business men of Baltimore and Philadelphia to establish a private mail route for their personal convenience, and "Constitutional" or "Goddard" post offices were established in those cities the same year in which Franklin was dismissed. "Constitutional" was the term applied by Mr. Goddard to distinguish them from the British system then in operation, while the name of the *de facto* promoter of the enterprise was the distinguishing name given it by others. Goddard's energies did not stop here. Like Andrew Hamilton had done, he visited the legislative assemblies of the several colonies without loss of time and had his coming and past successes advertised by press notices. His plans were well received, for the time for independence had arrived. The result was the organization of a postal system in America, before the Declaration of Independence was adopted, to all intents and purposes independent of the British. Every colony except the Carolinas and Georgia, the southern division of the British system, adopted the Constitutional post office, and some of the colonial legislatures forbid the further operation of the British system within their domains. The model rules of the "Constitutional" post as suggested by Goddard probably show more clearly the ideas and the principles which were regarded as fundamental in the operation of posts. They are as follows:

"1. That subscriptions be opened for the establishment of a post office and for the necessary defense of post officers and riders employed in the same.

"2. That the subscribers in each colony shall annually ap-

point a Committee from among themselves consisting of seven persons whose business it shall be to appoint Postmasters in all places within their respective Provinces, where such offices have hitherto been kept, or may hereafter be judged necessary, and to regulate the postage of letters and packets with the terms on which newspapers are to be carried; which regulation shall be printed and set up in each respective office.

“3. That the postmasters shall contract with and take bonds with sufficient securities, of suitable persons, to perform the same duty as hath hitherto been performed by Post Riders, subject to the Regulation and controll of the committee.

“4. That the several mails shall be under lock and key and liable to the inspection of no person but the respective postmasters to whom directed, who shall be under oath for the faithful discharge of the trust reposed in them.

“5. That a Postmaster General shall be annually chosen by the written vote of all Provincial Committees, enclosed and sent to the Chairman of the New York Committee, who, on receiving all the votes, and giving one month's publick notice in all the New York papers, of the time and place appointed for that purpose, shall open them in Committee, in presence of all such subscribers as shall choose to attend, and declare the choice, which choice shall be immediately communicated to all the other Provincial Committees by a certificate under the hand of the said Chairman.

“6. That the Postmaster General shall be empowered to demand and receive the accounts from the several Postmasters throughout the Colonies connected with this Post Office, and shall adjust and liquidate the same, and by his order, transfer in just proportion the surplussage of one office to make good the deficiencies of another, if any such should appear, and in case of a deficiency upon the whole, he shall have power to draw for the same on the several Committees in proportion to the amount of the subscription in their departments; and, at the year's end transmit to the said Committee a fair and just account of the whole post office under his inspection.

“7. That the several postmasters shall charge — per cent

on all monies received into their respective offices for their services; and also — per cent for the use of the Postmaster-General which they shall submit to him quarterly, with their accounts.

“8. That whatever balances may remain in the hands of the several Postmasters after all charges are paid shall, by the direction of the subscribers in the Province or Provinces where such Postmasters reside, be appropriated to the enlargement of the present Institution within their respective provinces.”

Although the adoption of “constitutional” posts was the separate work of the several colonies through their legislatures, all seemed to recognize the principle insisted upon by Mr. Goddard that posts should be under the jurisdiction of a central government—the Continental Congress—and each legislature which adopted the “constitutional” system inserted in its postal law the proviso that such system should be discontinued whenever the Continental Congress devised a postal plan and assumed such powers. When in 1775 the Continental Congress did take up the matter thirty of the largest towns of America were operating “constitutional” post offices.

THE CONFEDERATION.

On May 31, 1775, the Continental Congress appointed Mr. Franklin, Mr. Linch, Mr. Lee, Mr. Wiling, Mr. S. Adams, and Mr. P. Livingston a committee to consider the best means of establishing posts for conveying letters and intelligence through the continent.

On July 25, 1775, the Continental Congress resolved to establish its own postal system and the following day unanimously elected the chairman of the postal inquiry committee, Benjamin Franklin, as Postmaster-General. With the appointment was appropriated a salary of \$1,000 per annum and \$340 per annum for a

secretary, and with the position was further granted practically unlimited power in the organization of the system.

While William Goddard was not appointed the first Postmaster-General by the Continental Congress, as his many friends thought he should be in recognition of his acceptable work in establishing "constitutional" posts, Franklin recognized his worth by appointing him the Surveyor of Posts, a position which at that time ranked second to the Postmaster-General. I quote from the *Virginia Gazette* of Williamsburg, Va., of date September 1, 1775, in explanation of this office:

"This day William Goddard, esq., surveyor, etc., to the Constitutional Post-Office, arrived at this city on a tour through the several united colonies to establish offices in the principal towns and other commercial places under the authority of Benjamin Franklin, esq., who is appointed Postmaster-General by the honorable the Continental Congress; and as soon as the officers are commissioned and the routes fixed the establishment will immediately take place."

Franklin's prior experience and the establishment of the constitutional post offices by Goddard theretofore, with which the people were familiar and which was similar to the system operated by the British, led him to make the new system a continuation of the old with but slight modification.

During Franklin's administration a weekly mail was provided for every city in the country, an accomplishment of great merit at that period.

Glancing back at one of the popular publications of that day, "Gaines Universal Register or American and British Kalendar" for the year 1775, we find beside a table of postage rates the following announcement:

“The Post arrives at Newport, from Westward, on Friday, at Boston on Saturday eve; returning to Providence and Newport on Tuesdays.”

The records showing the details of Franklin's system are very meagre, but we know that the service was not only improved, but that it needed no appropriation from Congress for its support. In a general way this system was summarized by an act of the Continental Congress of October 18, 1782, the first national act attempting to outline a postal system for the United Colonies. It authorized the Postmaster-General to appoint deputies for whose fidelity he was to be accountable, to establish a line of posts between New Hampshire and Georgia, and to such other places as he might think proper or Congress might direct. The Postmaster-General was at liberty to pay deputy postmasters what he deemed their services worth, not exceeding twenty per centum of the postage collected. All surplus moneys were to be used for the improvement of the system, such as the employment of additional mail carriers and the establishment of new offices. During this period also, the postal system extended its western line. Pittsburg was made a post office in 1786, and on January 1, 1787, the first mail route was established to the Ohio—the then western boundary of civilization.

THE UNITED STATES.

The next important event in our postal history, as well as our nation's history, is the close of the Revolutionary War, the withdrawal of the British postal agents, who had worked in opposition to our system, and the subsequent transition from the Confederation to the United States by the adoption of the Federal Constitution. There were too many important matters for the legislature of the new government to consider,

however, and Congress gave postal business no consideration except to authorize the Postmaster-General to continue the system theretofore in force. The first United States law reorganizing the postal system was passed in 1794. Then followed a series of laws which worked over and reconstructed the system, repeating much of the old, adding new features, dropping those which experiments showed were not desirable, stating in plainer terms the exact meaning of existing rules, and making new ones. The principal reconstructive acts were passed in 1799, 1808, 1810, 1815, 1825, 1845, and finally in 1872 the postal code which is in substance the law of to-day. Of course, many important features were added by appropriation bill riders and special laws.

Having briefly reviewed the general political changes in our postal system, a consideration of some of its separate features follows.

MAIL TRANSPORTATION.

Before post routes were established in America for the benefit of the public, schemes were adopted for the transmission of official letters. In Virginia this was provided for by an act of the Virginia Assembly dated March 13, 1657, which directed:

“That all letters superscribed for the public service shall be immediately conveyed from plantation to plantation to the place and person directed under penalty of one hogshead of tobacco for each default; and if any extraordinary charge arise thereby, the commissioners of each county are hereby authorized to judge thereof and levy payment for the same. These superscriptions are to be signed by the governor, council or secretary, or any commission of the quorum, or any of the committee appointed for the militia.”

And by the Pennsylvania Assembly in March, 1683, for that state, as follows:

“Every justice of the peace, sheriff, or constable within the respective counties of this province and territories thereof, to whose hands or knowledge any letter or letters shall come directed to or from the governor shall dispatch them within three hours at the furthest after receipt of knowledge thereof, to the next sheriff or constable, and so forward as the letters direct, upon the penalty of twenty shillings for every hour's delay. And in such cases all justices of the peace, sheriffs or constables are herewith empowered to press either man or horse for that purpose, allowing for a horse or man two pence per mile to be paid out of the public stock.”

The first American mail carrier on a regular route was employed to run between New York and Boston in 1672. He was paid a salary. This was the route established by Governor Lovelace, and in a letter from him to Governor Winthrop the latter was urged to patronize the mail carrier by giving him letters to bring back to New York so as to make the venture pay.

During the colonial period post riders and ships were the most common means of transportation. The stage coach was not introduced in the postal service until 1785, and five years thereafter there were but twenty mail contracts (corresponding to the number of stage-coach routes) in existence, this, probably, owing to the absence of passable highways.

Until a comparatively recent date, one of the most discouraging features of the postal service was the slowness and uncertainty of the mails. Like our modern expressman, mail carriers not only made out their own schedules but set them aside at their own pleasure. If the day on which a mail was to leave or arrive was known, it was considered sufficiently definite. After the adoption of the stage coach, attention was

directed to rapid transit. The progress seemed incredible, and thereafter the Postmaster-General took special delight in reporting improvements in transportation facilities and in experimenting with new means whenever Congress could be induced to give authority therefor. This is illustrated by the report of Postmaster-General Gideon Granger to the House of Representatives in 1810, viz.:

. . . "To write from Portland (Maine) to Savannah and receive an answer back required at the beginning of the century 40 days; now only 27 are necessary. For the same purpose, between Philadelphia and Lexington (Kentucky) 32 days were formerly needed, now only 16. Between Philadelphia and Nashville formerly 44 days, now only 30."

The experiment was tried of operating stage lines owned by the government. Postmaster-General Granger started such a line between Philadelphia and Baltimore (the termini of the first constitutional route) in 1811, which within three years cleared \$11,000. Congress, however, did not favor the plan even though the experiment was financially a success, and the Philadelphia-Baltimore route was abandoned.

The next addition to mail transportation facilities was Robert Fulton's invention, the steamboat. There was apparently no notice taken of the successful trip of the "Clermont" in connection with mail transportation until 1813. That year Congress authorized contracts with steamboat companies for carrying the mails. As the business of the country increased, still more rapid facilities were needed and various experiments tried. One of the important ones was the noted "pony express" in 1836, the principal feature of which was the riding in relays and on a schedule which permitted no delay in transferring the mail from one carrier to another at transfer stations. It might have been termed a special

delivery service on a large scale. Triple postage was charged on letters transported by this limited express. While the experiment was not a financial success, and many of the pony express routes were discontinued within a few years after the experiment began, at that time it was "rapid transit" in fact as much as the "limited mail" is rapid transit to-day. The introduction of the pony express was regarded as an epoch in postal history, and it was this, no doubt, which induced the Postmaster-General by an order dated May 1, 1837, to change the seal of the Post Office Department from the design of Mercury riding on the clouds to an actual scene in postal life—the then latest means of rapid mail transportation—a galloping pony carrying a mail messenger and mail bag.

There is no earlier incident in post office history which would suggest a galloping pony, for prior to the introduction of the stage coach there were no highways, and it is difficult to imagine a galloping pony going through a wilderness. This suggestion, however, is presented in connection with a reference to an article by the historian, Benson J. Lossing in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* for February, 1869, (Volume XXXVIII, p. 319) in which he states that Postmaster-General Benjamin Franklin, when first appointed Postmaster-General issued a circular concerning the postal service on which was a picture of a galloping pony, which, he assumed, was the origin of the present seal.

The "pony express" experiment was short-lived. Akin to it, however, was the famous overland route operating from Missouri to the Pacific Coast and established by an act of Congress of 1861. The postage charged on this route was the regular rate, fifty cents per ounce. The service on this route was performed by mounted carriers, forty continually riding each way,

each carrier averaging 50 miles per day. The overland route is so well described by Mark Twain that I repeat the description here:

“Now they say, ‘here he comes.’ Far away on the other side of the desolate prairie a black speck appears arising on the horizon; it is plain it ‘moves.’ In a second or two the dark speck resolves itself into a horse and rider, rising and falling, sweeping toward us, nearer and nearer; it grows, the outlines become sharper and the faint sound of hoofs strikes on the ear; then the next moment the rider rushes past waving his hand to us, and flying along like the belated fragment of a storm. All this takes place so quickly and so resembles a freak of the imagination that if it were not for the melting flake of white foam which hangs quivering on the mail bag after the apparition has passed, we might doubt if we had seen any actual man and horse.”

The one experiment of the pony express period (1836–1838) which has become a practical means of transportation is the railroad. Two years after the pony express was begun Congress by law declared that all railroads should thereafter be deemed post roads and authorized the Postmaster-General to have the mails transported in that manner if it could be done reasonably.

Since 1838 we have had but few new means of transportation for long distances. The steamboat and locomotive have been improved so materially that there is nothing better now, and we can send a letter from New York to England in the number of days corresponding with the number of weeks required half a century ago, and over land a letter can be sent as far in twenty-four hours as it could have been sent in a month by the most rapid transportation in use when the Constitution was adopted. Of course, we have had some new means of transportation added since 1836, not the least of which

is the pneumatic tube of which we now have contracts for the construction of more than fifty-one miles in five of our largest cities. Some of these tubes are now in operation. While pneumatic tube service contracts specify a speed of but thirty miles per hour, it is much more rapid than any other service covering similar routes, such as wagon or street car service, and it is especially convenient because the tube can be kept in constant operation. This system is expensive as the contract price payable by the department is as high as \$17,000 per mile per annum rental for a double tube—the system from the general post office in Philadelphia to the Bourse station, a distance of about seven and one half miles costing the government more for the service per annum than the gross expenditure of the Post Office Department during the year 1791. But, for the business of to-day, pneumatic tubes have become a necessity.

In addition to the means of transportation used in our mail service referred to, automobiles, street cars, bicycles, dog and reindeer sledges, and practically every means of transportation known assist in carrying the mail in United States territory. The length of the United States post routes have increased from the one single trail through an unbroken forest from New York to Boston in 1672 to a combined length sufficient to reach around the earth at its greatest circumference more than twenty times.

But, describing the mechanical contrivances for mail transportation is but half of the story of our rapid mail deliveries of to-day. The personnel of the postal service, especially that branch which sorts and distributes the mail, should have at least equal credit with the mechanical means for the efficient service. Until a comparatively recent date almost all mail matter was

sorted at post offices and transported in bulk to the post office for which it was intended, or to some central post office where it was resorted and bagged for the post office of delivery. This plan seemed to be the original one, as is indicated by the letter of Governor Lovelace to Governor Winthrop referred to, describing the system of having "divers baggs" for the several post offices en route, and permitting the mail carrier to carry outside the mails only such letters as were to be delivered "by the way."

Slightly more than one hundred years after this letter was written we have another pen picture of the system by Mr. Thatcher, of the United States House of Representatives, in a report from a spécial committee made to that body April 4, 1796. An excerpt from this report follows:

"All papers and packages directed to distant customers and to be left at different offices and places, are put loose into the portmanteau with others, for subscribers less distant, and as often as the mail is opened the newspapers are all thrown together out of the portmanteaus in order to find the individual paper or package to be left at such office or place. At such times there is good reason to suppose papers and small packages are taken away by persons present at the opening of the portmanteau, to whom they are not directed, but without the knowledge or privity of the postmasters or carriers of the mail. Sometimes also, it may be presumed, single papers and mail bundles are unintentionally omitted to be put into the portmanteau again, after they have been turned out, for the purpose of selecting such as are to be left at that particular place."

A half century later the needs of the postal service required more speedy distribution than could be accomplished under the plans adopted theretofore, and the railway post office was introduced about June 9, 1864,

on the Chicago and Northwestern Railway, between Chicago, Ill., and Clinton, Iowa, with A. F. Bradley as head clerk and P. A. Leonard as his assistant in charge. The advantages of the new system, having the mails sorted while being transported, were so apparent that post office cars were introduced on other roads. Now the railway mail service is as necessary a feature of the United States mail service as are mail trains.

LETTER CARRIERS.

In the postal system Andrew Hamilton introduced in the American colonies, mail matter which was not called for at the post office within forty-eight hours after arrival was to be delivered at the residence of the addressee. Benjamin Franklin when Deputy Postmaster-General under the British government also introduced delivery of mail by carrier in Philadelphia. During the whole colonial period, however, house delivery of mail had an uncertain status. In England, after the passage of the law in which postmasters were charged with the "delivery of mail matter," a contention arose whether postmasters were required to carry letters to the houses of the addressees without extra compensation, or whether addressees must call at post offices for their mail. From 1768 to 1774 this question was not only discussed by postmasters with their patrons, but it was brought to the attention of the Postmaster-General of England and to the Courts. In the cases of *Rowning v. Goodchild* (2 W. Bl. 906, 3 Will, 413) and *Smith v. Powditch* (Cop. 182) the courts held that a postmaster is bound to deliver letters to the several inhabitants of a post town gratis, but not beyond the limits of such post town. The postmasters nullified these decisions in effect by permitting letters to remain in their offices so long before delivering them

that the addressees were finally glad to call at the post office for their letters.

The first constructive postal law passed by Congress (1794) established letter carrier's positions. Letter carriers received no salaries from the government, but were permitted to charge two cents for each letter delivered. Of course, there were people then who economized as well as now, and to accommodate them, all patrons of a post office had the option of accepting the service or rejecting it by giving proper notice. This, however, simply cut the expense in two, for postmasters were authorized to charge one cent per letter for handling the letter to the addressee. About 1859 letter carriers were limited in their fees to one cent per letter, delivered or collected, and at that date postmasters were no longer permitted to charge extra fees. The house delivery system was somewhat slow and uncertain. As late as 1860 we find the postmaster at New York reporting to the Postmaster-General that from an up-town office in that city the letter carrier made but three trips per week. It was not until 1863, the year that marks probably the greatest advance in our postal system, that free delivery of mail was authorized in the United States and letter carriers were paid regular salaries by the government.

Free delivery, as thus established, is now authorized for cities and towns containing a population of 10,000, or producing \$10,000 per annum gross receipts. Within the past decade Congress further gave authority and made appropriations for experimental free delivery in rural districts. The first three experimental rural routes were established by Postmaster-General Wilson October 1, 1896, in the vicinity of his West Virginia home. They radiated from Charlestown, Halltown and Uvilla, W. Va. The three experimetnal routes of

1896 have now increased to more than thirty thousand permanent ones which are served by almost that number of carriers.

SECURITY OF THE MAILS.

The security of the mails was regarded as one of the important features of the postal service in the beginning. When the first route was established by Governor Lovelace, it was advertised that

“those that be disposed to send letters to bring them to the Secretaries’ office where in a lockt box they shall be preserved till the messenger calls for them, all persons paying the post before the bag is sealed up.”

When Franklin was given authority to establish the present postal system he could not, of course, make criminal laws or orders to punish offenders against the mails. The extent of the protection at that time was simply State laws, consisting of thirteen different codes. It was not until 1794 that Congress took the matter in hand and went to the other extreme, making the mails as sacred as life itself, by providing the death penalty for embezzling or stealing mail matter. Before the end of the eighteenth century, however, flogging was substituted for this rigorous punishment, and now we have the more humane, but none the less effective imprisonment for most of the ordinary postal offenses. Now also, our system of postal criminal laws covers almost every offense connected with the mails, from detaining a letter or mail carrier unnecessarily to embezzling letters and robbing the mail. Further, there is a system of fines imposed on mail contractors for losses resulting from carelessness which does not amount to a violation of the statutes. These laws and regulations give the mails the best of protection.

To this form of security the government has added the registry system. This idea was presented to Con-

gress in 1854 by Postmaster-General Campbell, and the following year it took the form of law. Then the registry fee was five cents, but as the plan did not prove a financial success, the fee was raised to twenty cents. Later it was reduced to ten and then to eight cents. Originally the registry system simply insured a systematic method of tracing lost letters and in case of loss the United States was held blameless. The registry indemnity act of 1897 authorized the insurance of registered first-class matter to not exceeding \$10, and in 1902 Congress raised the limit to not exceeding \$100. By regulation, however, registered first-class matter is insured only to its actual value not exceeding \$25.

But, putting aside the insurance feature, the system is so nearly perfect and sure in its operations that not more than one registered letter out of 23,037 is lost. To better comprehend these figures it can be stated otherwise. If a man and his descendants were to mail one registered letter per week for 443 years, and some time during that period mail one extra letter, the only one lost, embezzled or stolen during that time would be the extra letter. While it is impossible to accurately apply the same character of statistics to ordinary mail matter, as not all losses of ordinary mail are reported to the department, if there were twice as many losses as are reported the proportion would be about one piece in every ten thousand letters, or, by mailing two hundred letters per year, which is more than the average American writes, only one would be lost every fifty years. This, of course, does not include mail which for insufficient address, or other fault of the writer or addressee, is sent to the Dead Letter Office.

POSTAGE.

The first American postage rates of which any record seems to exist was established by the West India Company for transporting letters from New Amsterdam to Holland, the rate per letter being three stivers of wampum.

In the patent granted to Thomas Neale the matter of postage was left entirely in his hands as a matter for contract, the patent providing that he shall "receive and deliver letters and papers under such rates and sums of money as the planters shall agree to give." The matter was not left to the planters individually, however, but the colonial legislatures established rates. Thus, the act of May, 1693, of the Pennsylvania Assembly established the rates from Philadelphia to New York at four pence half penny; to Connecticut, nine pence; to Rhode Island, twelve pence; to Boston, fifteen pence; to points in New England beyond Boston, nineteen pence. While the rates in some of the colonies differed slightly, they were practically uniform for like distances under the Neale patent.

Of what a letter consisted at that period we can only surmise, but it was probably any communication, either long or short, as experience had not yet shown the necessity of a definition as to what constituted a letter. The act of 9th Anne referred to, however, defined a letter to be one written sheet of paper not exceeding an ounce in weight. This remained the definition of a letter for regulating postage rates for more than one hundred years. This act also established uniform postage rates for similar distances for all the colonies. To compute postage rates at that period required a better knowledge of arithmetic and geography than is necessary now, notwithstanding the different modes of transportation and numerous post offices of to-day.

From 1711 to the middle of the nineteenth century the manner of transporting the mail, the distance transported, the number of sheets of paper upon which the communication was written, the weight, and the unusual accommodations desired were to be ascertained before the postage rate could be computed.

The rates established by 9th Anne, the average rate for a single letter transported not to exceed sixty miles over land, was four pence, and not exceeding one hundred miles was six pence. Double letters and treble letters, which has reference to the number of sheets of paper used, not the number of separate communications, and those weighing one full ounce were rated at double, treble and quadruple rates. By the act of 5th George III. (1765) these rates were reënacted in substance, and to the act was appended authority for the Postmaster-General of England to establish penny post offices in America. Needless to say no use was made of this authority.

When constitutional post offices were established the rates under the act of 5th George III. were adopted by the several colonies in their separate legislatures, but when the Continental Congress assumed the burden of the postal service a horizontal reduction of twenty per centum on all post rates was made. Postage was payable only in gold prior to the Revolutionary War. Subsequently Continental currency was accepted and as the comparative value of that money decreased postage increased until just before the French Alliance postage rates were increased to forty times what they were at the beginning of the Revolution. After the French Alliance and the restoration of confidence in the new government, however, the financial thermometer responded and by resolution of Congress of December 12, 1780, letter rates were reduced to one

half what they were at the beginning of the Revolution. As a matter of interest in this connection it is noted that at but one other time in American history were postage rates abnormally increased. This was from February 1, 1815, to February 1, 1816, when all postage rates were increased fifty per centum.

As the postal service improved by the introduction of new features from time to time, together with the enlargement of the system, estimating postage rates became more complicated. Passing over numerous unimportant changes we will next view the system just after the passage of the act of February 20, 1792, the first United States law revising postage rates. The cheapest possible rate then was six cents, for which a letter weighing less than one ounce, consisting of but one sheet of paper, if mailed at a post office, might be transported over land not more than thirty miles to another post office where the addressee would have to call for it. These rates increased with the distance, twenty-five cents being charged for 450 miles. Double letters, treble letters and those weighing one full ounce were charged double, treble or quadruple rates respectively. If the letter weighed the slightest fraction less than one full ounce and consisted of but one sheet of paper, a single rate was sufficient. If the sender did not want to carry the letter to the post office himself, but handed it to a mail carrier, an extra cent was payable for the mail carrier's fee. If the route over which the letter was to travel was by sea, the rate was eight cents, the extra two cents being the boat captain's fee. If the sender was a business man and wanted to consult a time table showing the departure of the mails, which was sometimes published by postmasters and kept in post offices, he was required to pay another cent for the privilege of thus ascertaining which route was the

fastest or preferable. The distance by sea was not material in this computation if the ports of mailing and address were in the United States. If the route was partly by land and partly by sea postage over each was charged separately as there was no free transfer from land routes to sea routes and *vice versa*. The estimated postage could be paid in whole or in part by the sender, the addressee paying the remaining postage due before delivery of letter.

To recite the various minor changes in letter postage rates would be monotonous, but there were some marked steps between the old plan and the present simple system of special interest. You have no doubt thought, as did many of the postmasters of the early days, of the difficulty, if not impossibility of determining how many sheets of paper were folded together, or inclosed in an envelope, that knowledge being necessary before rating postage. The postal authorities, in instructing postmasters on this point, passed it off as an easy matter and advised them: "after a little experience you will generally be able to decide by feeling or by holding the letter to the light."

The act of March 3, 1845, eliminated this feature of the postal system by declaring that weight, and not number of pieces of paper, should thereafter form the basis for postage rates. One half ounce was declared to be the standard for a letter. Further, the table of rates and distances was simplified so that a letter could be sent not exceeding three hundred miles for five cents, and any distance in the United States except to points on the Pacific Coast for ten cents. Just six years later there was another and material reduction to three cents for one half ounce letter any distance in the United States not exceeding three thousand miles, and five cents for any greater distance, the Pa-

cific Coast excepted. Again, in the epoch year, 1863, the letter postage rates were made uniform without regard to distance throughout the United States. Reductions in letter postage have further been made. Now one ounce is the standard for a letter, and for two cents a letter can be sent to any post office on the American continent north of the southern boundary of Mexico, to the Canal Zone, to the Philippines or Shanghai, China.

The American postal system has been the father of the American newspaper. While in our earliest postal history newspapers were not considered mail matter and were not carried as such, postmasters and letter carriers were permitted to maintain other lines of business, and their natural business seemed to be that of publishing. A postmaster was brought into contact with the people of his post town, was in position to secure the news, could deliver papers from his office without cost to himself, and could invariably make better terms with the post rider to distribute his papers than could another publisher, inasmuch as the post rider depended upon the postmaster for his position. The ethics of such an arrangement to-day is not commented upon, but the fact is merely stated that in those days such advantage was considered simply an asset of the position. John Campbell, a Scotch bookseller and postmaster at Boston under the Neale patent system, started the first American newspaper in 1704, and in the first issue of the paper (April 17, 1704) appeared the following announcement:

"All persons in town and country may have the said News Letter weekly, upon reasonable terms, agreeing with John Campbell, postmaster, for the same."

While Benjamin Franklin was engaged in newspaper work, before he was connected with the postal service,

the advantage of the combination is clearly shown by the following excerpt from his autobiography:

“In 1737 Colonel Spotswood, late governor of Virginia and then Postmaster-General, being dissatisfied with the conduct of his deputy at Philadelphia respecting some negligence in rendering and want of exactness in framing his accounts, took from him the commission and offered it to me. I accepted it readily and found it of great advantage; for though the salary was small, it facilitated the correspondence that improved my newspaper, increased the number demanded, as well as the advertisements to be inserted, so that it came to afford me a considerable income. My old competitor’s newspaper declined proportionately, and I was satisfied without retaliating his refusal, while postmaster, to prevent my papers being carried by the riders. Thus he suffered greatly from his neglect in due accounting.”

It is hard for us to realize now the extent to which public office was prosecuted for private gain without a realization of the offense. The custom referred to of a deputy postmaster, who was also a publisher, bribing a mail carrier, or through fear of dismissal, compelling him to carry his paper at lower rates than his competitor, was in fact a mild form of misfeasance to the not uncommon practice of trying to crush a competitor by compelling the mail carrier to decline to carry the latter’s papers at all. No one recognized this as an abuse, or understood the need of a regulation on this subject better than Benjamin Franklin, and after he became Deputy Postmaster-General of America he issued an order (1758) authorizing the acceptance of newspapers as mail matter at the small postage rate of 9d. per year for carrying one paper fifty miles, and 1s. 6d. for carrying one paper one hundred miles. The privilege of nominal postage on newspapers thus given publishers was soon looked upon as a right, and after the dismissal

of Franklin from the British-American postal service, one of the chief arguments in favor of an independent post was that this order might be changed by a Deputy Postmaster-General favorable to the King's policy, and a prohibitive newspaper rate imposed, or at least a rate so large that it would limit the dissemination of news to the colonists.

In 1782, Congress recognized newspapers by resolving that mail carriers be licensed to carry newspapers at rates to be fixed by the Postmaster-General. Ten years thereafter Congress fixed the uniform liberal rate of one cent for one paper one hundred miles or less, one and one half cents for carrying a paper any greater distance, and printers were authorized to send one paper to every other printer of a newspaper in the United States free of postage. The law at this time did not specify what constituted a newspaper or take into consideration its weight. Shortly after the passage of the act of 1792, Congress went a step further by permitting certain officers of the United States government to receive newspapers free of postage during the entire term of service, and Senators and Members of the House of Representatives were permitted to receive them free of postage while Congress was in session and for twenty days thereafter. The department went even further than cheap transportation in order to encourage the printer. It not only permitted papers to be sent without prepayment of postage, but it kept running accounts for the postage with subscribers. The result of this "tick" system turned out as disastrously for the United States as it usually does with private firms as is shown by an order and reasons therefor, issued by Return J. Meigs when Postmaster-General. He says:

“Experience has proved how little attentive many people are to the payment of such small debts as arise from trusting postage for newspapers; you are therefore not to give credit. Some postmasters write that they have scarcely collected fifty percent of the postage of newspapers.”

Then to even up old scores, postmasters were directed thereafter to require subscribers to pay postage for a full quarter in advance before delivering papers to them, and if there was any obstinacy on the part of the addressee, postmasters were authorized to sell the papers for the postage due.

The act of March 3, 1845, authorized the free distribution of newspapers of a limited size to subscribers living within thirty miles of the office of publication, and later this was changed to the free distribution under limited conditions to subscribers within the county of publication.

Another experiment in connection with newspaper postage was the act of March 3, 1851, which established quarterly rates, under which a weekly paper weighing not more than three ounces could be sent to a *bona fide* subscriber not more than fifty miles for five cents per quarter, three hundred miles for ten cents per quarter, etc., to four thousand miles for thirty cents per quarter. Papers published less frequently or more frequently were given corresponding rates. This plan was modified the following year by making the uniform rate of one cent for papers not exceeding three ounces in weight to any distance in the United States, or, if the postage was paid for one quarter in advance, fifty per cent. off.

It was not until January 1, 1875, that postage on newspapers and periodicals of the kind prescribed by law as entitled to “pound rates” was based upon the bulk weight (two and three cents per pound, according

to the frequency of issue) to be paid in advance by the publisher. This rate has been reduced to one cent per pound for any distance within the United States, its possessions, Canada, Mexico, or Shanghai, China.

Other classes of mail matter gradually "grew" into the system. As early as 1799, a separate rate was fixed for magazines and pamphlets which compares to the "third class rates" of to-day. Later, Congress realized that the postal service was being used to transport small articles of merchandise, and as early as the act of June 8, 1872, Congress fixed the rate for merchandise (fourth class matter) at one cent per ounce, the rate to-day.

POSTAGE STAMPS.

Postage stamps, the invention of Roland Hill, of England, were adopted by the British government in 1840. Postmasters of the United States recognized their value before our statesmen did, and a number of postmasters issued private stamps which were pasted on letters instead of writing thereon the word "paid," as was the practice theretofore when postage was paid in advance. On March 3, 1847, the United States government, following the British, officially adopted postage stamps for its postal service.

The value of this system of collecting postage in advance is so well recognized that it is now a part of the postal system of every civilized country on the globe, and it is only occasionally that our postal officials get a glimpse of the old practice when some of our sister republics in South America run short in their stamp supply.

About the time of the introduction of postage stamps from England was the introduction of envelopes (1842) from France. France is a country of novelties, and envelopes were originally so classed and were intro-

duced as a freak of fashion. The public looked upon them otherwise after a short time. The stationers of the country became alarmed for fear the sale of sealing wax would be materially lessened thereby, and discouraged their use. From a "freak of fashion" envelopes became later a "business necessity," and then for a time it was regarded as a lack of respect to use them in personal correspondence. Now, however, envelopes are as indispensable to the postal system as postage stamps.

Postal cards were introduced in 1873.

THE MONEY ORDER SYSTEM.

The postal money order system was inaugurated in 1864, and, although it was regarded as a serious experiment for a long time, and its growth was thereby greatly retarded, it has in recent years grown more rapidly and now we have about 37,000 such offices in the United States. This is one branch of the postal service which always shows a ledger balance in favor of the government. While from the beginning the objection was made that the money order system interferes with private banking business, three of our Postmaster-Generals (Creswell, Wanamaker and Gary) have advocated a further extension of this class of business by the introduction of postal savings banks, such as are connected with the postal administration of many European countries.

FOREIGN MAILS.

It may seem improbable to those who have given our postal history but little study that prior to 1847 there were no postal arrangements between the United States and any foreign country except Canada. Postal arrangements were made with Canada as early as 1792 by our Postmaster-General with Hugh Finlay, Deputy Postmaster-General of Canada after the close of the Revolution.

It is true the postal act of 1825 authorized the Postmaster-General to provide for the receipt of letters intended for foreign countries and to make arrangements with postmasters of foreign countries to deliver the same, but it was not until 1844, when by a joint resolution of the Senate and the House of Representatives that foreign postal administrations were recognized by authorizing the Postmaster-General to make postal arrangements with foreign governments. In 1847 the first postal treaty to which the United States was a party was made with Bremen, and two years later the second treaty was made with Great Britain. Thereafter they became common. The postage rates with foreign countries, even after these treaties were entered into, were very much more complicated than our domestic rates. First was to be charged the domestic or land postage required to transport a letter to the seaboard from any interior town with its varying rates. Second, the sea postage, which was within the discretion of the steamship carrying the mail, and which was different over almost every line of vessels even though the ports of clearance and arrival were the same, for, while monthly packets plied regularly between Falmouth and New York as early as 1755, neither the British nor any other post office had a regular postal line to America until a long time thereafter. Then, if the letter was to be delivered in an interior city in the country of address, there was another item to be added for land transportation which in the majority of cases was to be computed on a different system for rating postage, and a different basis of weights and money. Until comparatively recently there were no regular schedules for the arrival and departure of trans-Atlantic steamers, and whether postage on a letter addressed abroad would be one dollar or only one twentieth of

that sum, or any intermediate amount, was practically a matter of chance, dependent upon the boat the letter sent would catch. With every mail would be sent a letter bill detailing the charges made and paid on each separate letter, for some letters were not prepaid at all, and others only in part. Each letter was in fact treated as a piece of freight is to-day. To add to the complications of this system accounts were kept by each of the postal administrations of the amount of postage on each letter which belonged to the several countries and persons handling the same. It is one of the delights of the writer to record that the suggestion for an improvement of this intricate system originated in the Post Office Department of the United States. Postmaster-General Montgomery Blair, who established free delivery and uniform postage rates, with his able first assistant, John A. Kasson, through the Secretary of State, communicated with European powers with the result that an international conference met at Paris in 1863. Because of the well-planned outline of what an international postal system should contain, and because the movement is a part of the history of our postal system, the letter referred to is here quoted:

“UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
“POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,
“WASHINGTON, August 4, 1862.

“*Sir:* Many embarrassments to foreign correspondence exist in this and probably in other postal departments which can be remedied only by international concert of action. The difference in postal principles, as well as postal details of arrangement in the several countries of both continents contributes to this result. Great diversity of rates prevail between the same points, in some instances as many as six different rates according to the route of transit. Mistakes are perpetually recurring, arising from the complexity of present

arrangements, and operate to the serious delay and expense of correspondents.

“For want of such general concert of action as above mentioned, difficulties frequently present themselves which prevent separate postal arrangements desired by this and any other national post department, where the mail traverses an intermediate country or postal line of conveyance.

“Without entering into details, it is evident that the international adjustment of a common basis for direct correspondence, and for intermediate land and ocean transit, and for an international registry system, and for the exchange of printed mail matter, is clearly of the first importance to the commercial and social intercourse between this and other nations.

“It is believed that a conference between fit representatives delegated by the several post departments of the principal corresponding countries of Europe and America, and to meet at some convenient point in Europe, would greatly facilitate the postal arrangements in which they are respectively interested. The practical knowledge of details necessary, and the special character of the interests involved indicate the propriety of a conference between postal representatives to arrange the proposition of improvement, rather than to submit them to the usual and more dilatory course of diplomacy between each two countries. The ramifications of the postal system, also, embracing so many countries, seem to require a general concurrence of action.

“To this end I respectfully request that you will invite the attention of foreign administrations to this subject, requesting their co-operation in the proposed conference, and ascertaining the time and place which would be most acceptable for that purpose, there to take into consideration the following subjects and any others which either department shall in writing propose. The powers of the postal representatives, it is presumed, will be limited to discussion and recommendation of measures for the adoption of their respective administrations.

“Attention is especially called to the following topics of international concern:

“1. A uniform standard weight for the single rate of written correspondence.

“2. A uniform standard for adjusting postal rates on printed correspondence exchanged.

“3. Uniformity of rates to destination, by whatever route of intermediate transit.

“4. Uniform conditions of prepayment, either compulsory or optional; or, if optional, a double rate when not prepaid.

“5. A uniform scale for the increase of rates.

“6. Whether each country may collect and retain the postage collected by it, whether compulsory or optionally prepaid, or remaining unpaid, thus avoiding accounts except for intermediate transit postal charges.

“7. Transit postal charges overland, by intermediate countries, to be established on a uniform basis, and accounted for by the ounce by the dispatching country, on matter transmitted in closed bags or otherwise.

“8. The same proposition for ocean transit in closed bags or otherwise.

“9. The disposition to be made of all letters not delivered in the country of destination.

“10. A uniform international system for the registration of letters, and postal charges therefor.

“11. Classification of printed matter which may be transmitted by mail, and the right reserved by each country in respect thereto.

“12. The right reserved by each country in respect to the route of transit of correspondence dispatched by it.

“13. The practicability of an international limited money-order system.

“14. Such other topics of postal importance as may be offered to the consideration of the conference by either national post department.

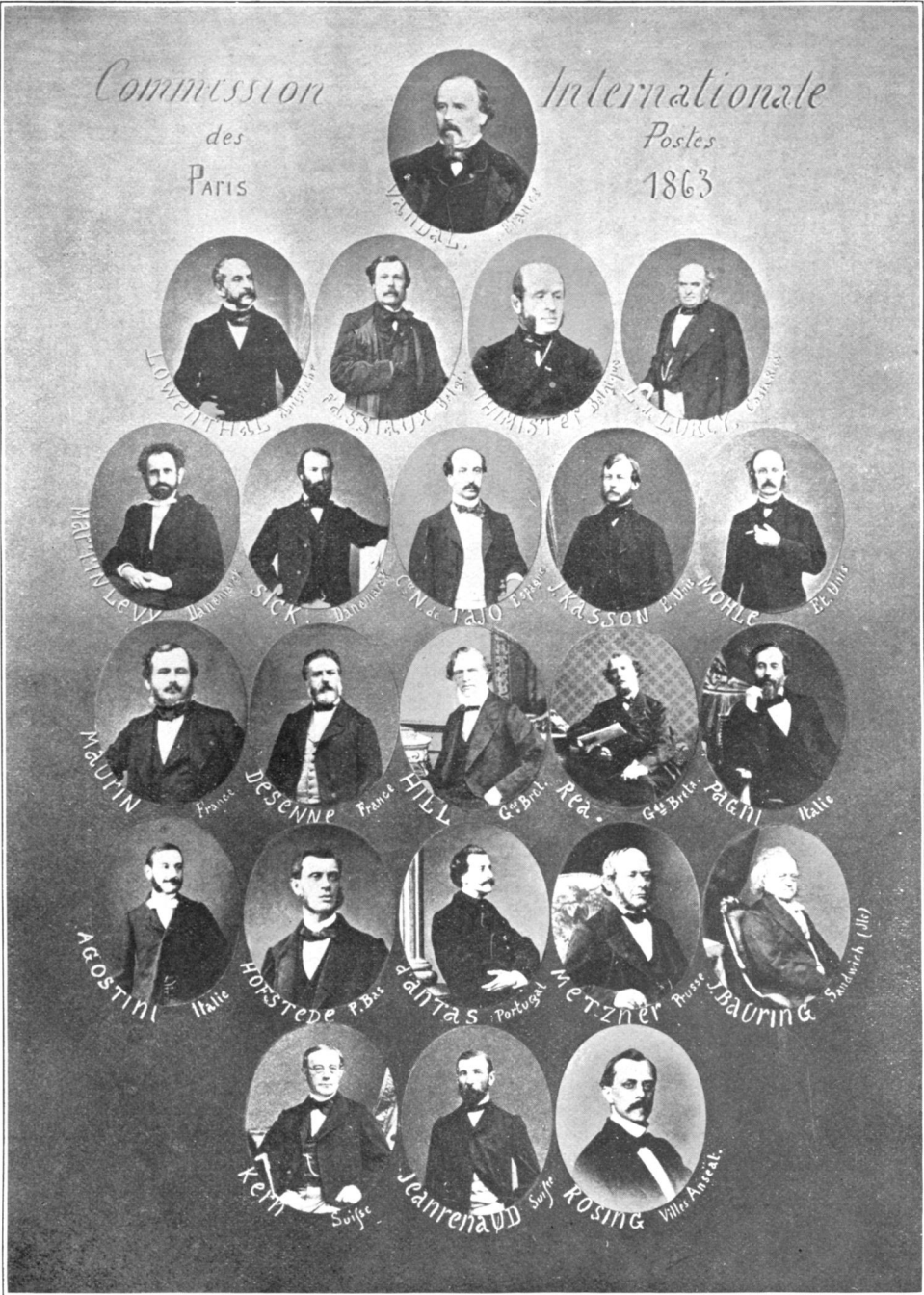
“I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

“M. BLAIR.

“Hon. William H. Seward,
“Secretary of State.”

At the gathering of the conference at Paris in 1863, which was the sequel of the letter above quoted, the United States was at the front in the person of John Kasson, and at its close the Swiss Minister, speaking for the conference, declared that "if the deliberations of the conference have led to results from which a favorable influence upon future postal treaties may be expected, these results are largely due to the liberal and conciliatory spirit constantly shown during the deliberations by the delegate of the government which took the initiative in the conference, Hon. John Kasson.

The delegates at this conference did not have power to bind their respective governments, but simply to adopt resolutions which were to be recommended for adoption by the several legislatures on the return home of the delegates. While the World's Postal System was not mentioned at this conference, and later the honor of suggesting it fell to the German postal administration with Dr. von Stephan at its head, that administration having experimented with a German-Austrian system, it is no doubt true that the American idea which resulted in the Paris Conference of 1863 led to the organization of the World's Postal Convention. The first of these conventions was held at Berne in 1874. Then followed the Paris Convention, 1878, Lisbon, 1885, Vienna, 1891, and Washington, 1897, with several other call meetings which were intended to pass upon special matters. At all of these conventions the United States took a foremost part, largely due to the fact that it had among its delegates men who were thoroughly familiar with the postal service, as Joseph Blackfan, who had risen from the ranks to the position of Superintendent of Foreign Mails at the Berne Convention, James N. Tyner and Joseph Blackfan, the former having passed through the degrees of postal experience from a special



INTERNATIONAL POSTAL COMMISSION, PARIS, 1863.
(From photograph in possession of Hon. John A. Kasson.)

agent in the field to Postmaster-General, at Paris; James S. Crawford, Superintendent of Foreign Mails, at Lisbon; N. M. Brooks, who at that time had nineteen years' postal experience and was Superintendent of Foreign Mails at Vienna, and James N. Tyner and N. M. Brooks, with one convention each to their credit, and A. D. Hazen, who had climbed the postal ladder from a \$1,200 clerkship to the office of Third Assistant Postmaster-General at the Washington Convention. At the last call convention at Berne, in 1900, our representatives were W. S. Shallenbarger, Second Assistant Postmaster-General, and N. M. Brooks, both experienced postal men. Others who accompanied the gentlemen named to some of the conventions were valuable representatives, but at a gathering of that nature, the very object of which is to decide on details, the experienced postal men have an advantage over others. The next regular convention will be held at Rome in the near future. It promises to be one of great importance, and in anticipation of it a large volume of 472 pages, containing matter which it is proposed to consider, has been published by the International Post Office at Berne.

The results of these conventions are not generally appreciated because people do not realize the unsatisfactory conditions of the foreign service prior to 1863. Now, postage rates are low and uniform to any country from any point in the United States, and the mails are safe, speedy and run on regular schedules. For the simplification of the system it is arranged that each country in the Postal Union accepts for free transportation and delivery within its domains letters on which the postage has been fully prepaid in the country of origin, each country retaining the postage it collects for its own use, thus eliminating the complicated system

of making out itemized expenses connected with the transportation of individual letters, and on international bookkeeping except for the transportation of mail matter in bulk across the country which originated elsewhere and is destined for a third country. Further, in advance of the arbitration court at The Hague, we have had established at International Headquarters at Berne a court which decides international controversies in postal matters. Truly, if there is to be a movement toward a world government, or a general court for the supervision of the world's governments, the postal service is leading toward that end as it led the United Colonies to independence.

The international money order and registry systems suggested in the letter of Postmaster-General Blair above quoted exist, but as this article is not intended to be comprehensive enough to cover the whole subject, those subjects are passed with this note.

POSTMASTERS.

Probably the first postmaster appointed in America was Richard Fairbanks. The record of the General Court of Massachusetts of 1639 shows the following order:

"It is hereby ordered that notice be given that Richard Fairbanks, his house in Boston is the place appointed for all letters which are brought from beyond the seas, or are sent thither to be left with him, and he is to take care that they are to be delivered or sent according to the direction. And he is allowed for every letter a penny, and must answer all miscarriages through his own neglect of this kind."

In contrast with this brief commission are those given one hundred and twenty years later, a specimen of which is as follows:

“BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, and WILLIAM HUNTER, Esquires,
“Post-Masters-General of all His Majesty’s Provinces and
Dominions on the Continent of North America.

“To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting, KNOW
YE, That We having received good Testimony of the Fidelity,
and Loyalty to his Majesty, of Woodward Abraham, Gent.
and reposing great Trust and Confidence in the Knowledge,
Care, and Ability of the said Woodward Abraham to Execute
the Office and Duties required of a Deputy Post-Master, have
Deputed, Constituted, Authorized, and Appointed, and by
these Presents do Depute, Constitute, Authorize, and Appoint
the said Woodward Abraham to be our lawful and sufficient
Deputy, to Execute the Office of Deputy Post-Master at
Marblehead in the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay, to have,
hold, use, exercise and enjoy the said Office with all and every
the Rights, Privileges, Benefits and Advantages, to the same
belonging, from the Day of the Date hereof, for the term of
three years, unless sooner removed by us, under such Condi-
tions, Covenants, Provisoos, Payments, Orders and Instruc-
tions, to be faithfully observed, performed, and done, by the
said Deputy, and Servants as he or they shall from Time to
Time, receive from Us, or by our Order.

“In Witness whereof, We the said BENJAMIN FRANKLIN,
and WILLIAM HUNTER have hereunto set our Hands and
caused the Seal of our Office to be affixed—Dated the tenth
Day of April 1758, in the Thirty first year of HIS MAJESTY’S
Reign.

“By the Post-Master General’s Command,

B. FRANKLIN,
WM. HUNTER.”

“James Parker,
“Agent and Comptroller,
“(pro tempore)”

The duties of postmasters in the early days of posts
were different from now, and probably in many cases
more irksome. They were expected to compute post-
age, which was no small matter, and to collect, which

was a much more difficult task than under to-day's improved system of collecting postage. The cash system was not deemed practicable when posts were first established. Referring to the *Boston News Letter* of January, 1713, we find a notice to the patrons of the Boston post office that those who would not promptly pay the postage due for the preceding month could have no further credit at the post. We have also referred to the credit system in connection with newspaper postage. This, of course, meant additional work and worry for the postmaster. Further, postmasters were expected to appoint, supervise and pay mail carriers.

The repairing of mail bags was next in importance in the line of duties, and the postal regulations as late as 1827 directed deputy postmasters to repair unsound mail bags before using them again, even if the mail was delayed thereby. Then, of course, it was expected that the post office be kept open so patrons could get their mail when they had the opportunity to call for it. One of the most thoroughly debated questions which ever agitated this country was the opening of post offices on Sunday and the transportation of mails on that day. This discussion began about 1810, when a law was passed requiring postmasters to attend their offices at reasonable hours every day of the week, and it was kept before the country for nineteen years. Finally a committee of the United States Senate was appointed to consider and report upon the question, and one of the relics in the office of the Postmaster-General is a copy of the report of this committee printed on silk and framed. In this report the question of Sunday labor is discussed from its various standpoints. The outcome of it all was that mails are transported regularly on Sunday, and all post offices above the

lowest grade are opened on Sunday for a few hours in order to give those who do not object to Sunday mails an opportunity to procure mail awaiting delivery.

Postmasters have always been poorly paid. Richard Fairbanks, postmaster at Boston, collected for his own use one penny for every letter he handled. While to-day this rate would be an enormous sum at the Boston post office, the few letters handled at that period gave Fairbanks a very slender income. Under the Neale patent postmasters were paid not exceeding twenty pounds (one hundred dollars) per annum. The first act of the Continental Congress in which salaries for postmasters were provided gave the matter into the hands of the Postmaster-General, with the limitation that such salaries do not exceed twenty per cent. of the income from postage. In addition to the salary there were certain privileges granted postmasters, not the least of which was the privilege of the frank for mailing letters, personal as well as official. While this concession could not have been of much benefit to some, to the publisher-postmaster this was of great value. Finally, in 1845, the franking privilege for postmasters was revoked, and now they are permitted to use penalty envelopes for the free transmission of mail matter only on official business. In fact, the franking privilege for personal letters has been taken from all except the widows of presidents of the United States. By special acts of Congress each widow of a president is entitled to the unlimited use of the frank during her natural life.

Although changes in the methods of computing compensation of postmasters have been made at different times, it has invariably been based either directly or indirectly upon the amount of business done at the office, with extra compensation for unusual or extra work, such as the distribution of mail at an interme-

diate office for transporting to other offices dependent upon such intermediate office, and to postmasters who are compelled to "arise in the night to receive mail" (which was considered "unusual" business several generations ago).

THE POSTMASTER-GENERAL.

When the English government first assumed jurisdiction of posts, it was necessary to compete with private concerns who might desire to carry on the same business. The monopoly in America was probably first introduced by the Director-General and Council of New Netherlands by the passage on June 12, 1657, of an ordinance forbidding the boarding of incoming vessels until visited by the governing officer and the delivery of letters on board under a penalty of thirty guilders, which was followed by a resolution of the West India Company requiring captains of vessels to enter into bond not to carry letters to Holland from New Netherlands or Curacoa unless received from persons authorized to collect them, under penalty of one hundred Carolus guilders. A letter box was placed in the office of the secretary of the province in New Amsterdam. In the postal act of 1660 the monopoly in favor of the government was made effective in the phraseology which has come down to us to-day with but slight modification.

As has been stated, the original idea in establishing "posts" was to raise revenue. The majority of the forty-four men who have been at the head of the United States postal service since July 26, 1775, have aimed to improve the service rather than to make it a profit-making business for the government. Franklin's idea was to make it just pay out, and while he endeavored to make each separate mail route pay a profit, and if

he found a route did not pay it was discontinued, yet, all the profits were used to experiment with new routes and new offices.

This policy was made more definite and more firmly fixed by the adoption of Article IX. of the Articles of Confederation which gave to Congress the sole and exclusive right and power of establishing and regulating post offices in the United States, and exacting "such postage as may be necessary to defray the expenses of said office." This plan was carried on for a number of years after the Constitution was adopted, and only in exceptional years prior to 1851 were the expenditures greater than the receipts. During a portion of this time the plan of "farming out" new routes until it was ascertained that they would pay was followed in order to save the government the expense of the experiment. In 1851, the year in which postage rates were reduced to three cents for a half ounce letter not exceeding three thousand miles, the service turned on a pivot, and there have been only three years since in which there has not been a deficit in postal finances at the close of the fiscal year. These exceptions are 1865, the close of the Civil War, and in 1882 and 1883, just before the reduction of first class postage from three cents to two cents per half ounce. The change of the balance from the credit to the debit side in 1851 seemed to be unexpected by Congress, and after some years of continued deficit the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Representatives called upon Postmaster-General Browne for an explanation. He sent a long reply in which he explained that the reduction of postage in connection with the transportation expenses to the Far West was the primary cause, as there had been no falling off in business. Fortunately, Congress did not go back to the "profit" or "make-it-

pay-out" plan. Now it is the policy of the postal officials to conduct the department for the benefit of its patrons. A post office is established wherever one is desired if it can be shown that a reasonable number of people will be accommodated, even though the cost of transporting the mail to such post office is one hundred times the amount of postage receivable therefrom. And further, instead of limiting the two cent per ounce rate to mail routes in the United States, arrangements are in force which extend this rate to all parts of Canada and Mexico, so that with few exceptions in postal rates, such as copyrighted works, fourth-class matter, etc., our postal territory covers practically the whole of North America.

There are from fifteen thousand to seventeen thousand postmasters appointed each year. For each of these positions there are a large number of applicants, and it is the duty of the Postmaster-General, or some one for him, to choose between them. Again, Congress has imposed upon the Postmaster-General the duty of preventing lotteries and frauds from operating through the mails, and prohibiting the carrying of obscene and certain classes of libelous and other improper matter. Herein must he exercise judicial discretion. While it is not so serious a matter to refuse a newspaper circulation because it contains a lottery advertisement, as the paper can be reprinted with the advertisement omitted, when it will be accepted, when a fraud order is issued it means the entire loss of such mail business, the legitimate portion as well as that declared illegal, and the person against whom it is issued is published to the world as a "fraud." And, under the decisions laid down by the courts, such cases, when decided by the Postmaster-General on evidence satisfactory to him, are not reviewable.

It has often been suggested that the telegraph system should be merged with the postal system of the United States as it is in England. Congress has had this matter under consideration on more than one occasion. When inventor Morse wanted to establish his experimental line he got permission to use the post office on Seventh Street, Washington, as one terminus and the Mount Clair post office station in Baltimore as the other. Between these two post offices the first telegraphic message was sent. For several years after its introduction to the postal service in this manner, Congress made appropriations for the department to keep up its telegraph lines, and for fully two years during the experimental stage there was in fact public ownership of telegraph lines. But, like the financially successful stage route between Philadelphia and Baltimore, Congress finally dropped the business as impracticable. In 1866 Congress again considered the subject and enacted that at any time after five years from that date the United States shall have the privilege of purchasing for postal, military or other purposes all the telegraph lines, with few unimportant exceptions, owned by private concerns. By the same act Congress offered aid to telegraph lines being constructed in exchange for services for the government at rates to be fixed by the Postmaster-General, and thus another duty was added to his list. A hundred other matters of minor importance require his supervision.

Postmaster-General Franklin started with one secretary, who also performed the work of a comptroller. The office of the First Assistant Postmaster-General was created before the close of the Revolution, and the act of 1794 authorized the Postmaster-General to employ four clerks. In 1810 the office of Second Assistant Postmaster-General was added; in 1836 the office of

Third Assistant Postmaster-General was added; in 1872 an Assistant Attorney-General for the department, and in 1891 Congress made an appropriation for a Fourth Assistant Postmaster-General without especially authorizing the position. The force of employees has steadily grown, so that now, although the department as originally authorized has been divided by placing the auditing branch under the Treasury Department, there are in the department at Washington 1,200 employees, more than 700 of whom draw salaries equal to or greater than that of Postmaster-General Franklin.

The name "General Post Office" was the cognomen given the main office of the postal system by the act of 1660, and this name was adopted by the United States and continued as late as 1837 as is shown by the seal used at that period.

When Franklin was Postmaster-General he made his reports to the Continental Treasurer, following the British custom. Samuel Osgood, however, started the practice of making his reports direct to the President, although he made some minor reports on financial matters to the Secretary of the Treasury. The Postmaster-General did not receive the same salary other heads of departments did, and consequently was not a member of the cabinet for a long period. In 1827, however, the salary was raised to \$6,000, the same as received by the heads of the other departments, who were cabinet members. For some reason the then Postmaster-General was not invited to attend cabinet meetings and did not attend. Immediately after the inauguration of President Jackson, however, William T. Barry, of Kentucky, was selected as Postmaster-General, and with his appointment came the invitation to become one of the President's official family.